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**Electoral Rules and the Political Representation of Ethnic Minorities:  
Evidence from Bulgaria and Romania<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** The political integration of ethnic minorities is one of the most challenging tasks facing the countries of post-communist Europe. The roads to political representation in the mainstream political process are numerous and diverse. This paper focuses on one form of political representation of ethnic minorities – ethnic political parties and analyses the way in which the electoral arrangements in the region have encouraged or discouraged ethnic parties. It uses the experience of Bulgaria and Romania to examine in detail the relationship between electoral arrangements and success of ethnic parties, and the impact of the presence of ethnic parties on trends of political participation of minorities.

The results of the analysis support the paper's argument that electoral arrangements are important but no key to achieving meaningful political representation. Electoral arrangements thus seem to matter, but to mostly do so in situations where other factors of political mobilization seem to make representation uncertain. The effect of electoral arrangements on the success of ethnic parties is clearly mitigated by the size and dynamics of the minority they represent. However, there seems to be some link between the presence of ethnic parties in the political system and the level of political participation of the ethnic minority.

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## Introduction

The debate over the proper form of minority rights in the post-communist world has intensified significantly over the last decade.<sup>2</sup> There are two main factors that have contributed to this phenomenon: the past history of suppression of minorities in the region and the incorporation of the principle of minority protection into the political requirements for entry into the European Union.

The representation of ethnic minorities in the political process is one of the components of minority protection. Minority representation can take various and diverse forms. Minorities can have their own representatives in the legislative institutions at both national and regional level; they can have minority “experts” in various consultative bodies to the government; alternatively, minorities can also be given a right to self-government. Achieving legislative representation can also be done in several ways – minorities can participate in the political process through non-minority specific parties; they can try to form their own parties and achieve representation along ethnic lines. There are also various ways in which the state, through its political institutions and legislative framework can encourage or discourage the representation of its minorities.

This paper investigates the relationship between one of the forms of ethnic political representations – ethnic parties – and one of the possible ways through which state policy can impact it – the type and nature of the electoral system. Ethnic parties exist in virtually all Eastern European states. The legal and institutional frameworks

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the “post-communist world” includes the countries of Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania. The other ex-Yugoslav republics are excluded because of the different nature of politics and ethnic relations there, as well as their relatively short experience with democratic institutions. However, in terms of ethnic make-up Croatia and Serbia & Montenegro are more similar to the states included in this study, than to the more ethnically heterogeneous states of Bosnia and Macedonia. The post-Soviet states are excluded for similar reasons.

of these countries, however, treat ethnic parties in several quite different ways. Albania and Bulgaria, for example, have banned ethnic parties. The Czech and Slovak Republics allow ethnic parties to exist and subject them to equal treatment by their electoral laws. Hungary and Poland not only permit ethnic parties to form and run in elections but also make it easier for them to gain representation at different levels of government. Finally, Romania and Slovenia provide the most extreme form of positive discrimination by providing guaranteed seats to minorities (subject to some limitations).

The paper provides a comparison between two quite different forms of minority electoral arrangements -- these in Bulgaria and Romania -- and analyses the impact they have had on the success of ethnic parties in the two countries. It concentrates on the political parties of two Romanian minorities -- the Hungarians and the Roma -- and on two Bulgarian ones -- the Turks and the Roma. The paper argues that the electoral arrangements have made a significant and consequential difference in the case of only one minority-- that of the Roma in both countries. The larger minorities in both Romania and Bulgaria have done similarly well despite differences in the institutional constraints on their behavior.

Finally, in an attempt to link institutional arrangements with the political behavior of individual members of minorities, the paper investigates whether the different electoral fate of Roma parties have had any impact on the levels of political participation of the Roma minorities in the two countries. For this purpose, the paper uses survey data from the UNDP *Avoiding the Dependency Trap* database.

### **Minorities in Bulgaria and Romania**

Bulgaria and Romania are an appropriate set of countries for a comparative study because they have relatively comparable ethnic make-ups and similar history of

inter-ethnic relations. In addition, their experiences with democratic transition have been relatively alike.

Table 1 presents some basic data on the ethnic situation in Bulgaria.

**[Table 1 About Here]**

The majority group constitutes about 84 % of the total population. The largest minority are the Turks, who make up about 9% of the total population, and are concentrated in three of the nine administrative regions of the country. The second largest minority are the Roma(Gypsies) who constitute about 4.6% of the population according to official statistics, although Roma experts provide almost twice as big estimates of their number (CEDIME 1999). The Roma live in all areas of the country. The Russian, Armenian and Vlach minority each makes up less than 1% of the population of Bulgaria, and Macedonians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Jews, and Romanians, each constitute less than .1 % of the total population.

The ethnic situation in Romania is roughly similar. Romanians constitute about 89% of the population in the country; there are two large minorities and several smaller ones. Table 2 presents the ethnic data for Romania.

**[Table 2 about here]**

The Hungarian minority, 6.6% of total population, is the largest one and is concentrated in several regions, similar to the Turks in Bulgaria (Alionescu 2003). The Roma of Romania are the most numerous Roma minority in Eastern Europe, but given the size of the total population of Romania, constitute only 2.5% of it, which makes them a smaller proportion than the Roma in Bulgaria. However, just as in the case of the Bulgarian Roma, experts estimate their population to be much bigger than official data -- around 1.8 million or 7.9 per cent of total population (CEDIME 2001).

Like Roma in Bulgaria and elsewhere, the Romanian Roma are scattered throughout the country. Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Turks, Tatars and Serbs are minorities that make up less than 1% but more than .1 % of the population, and the smaller groups of Slovenes Slovaks, Bulgarians, Jews, Czechs, Poles, Greeks and Armenians constitute less than 0.1 of a percent each.

The two countries have clear dominant majorities, a single, substantial and concentrated minority (Turks in Bulgaria and Hungarians in Romania), a substantial but scattered second minority (Roma) and a multitude of smaller ethnic groups with which this paper is only marginally concerned. The four minorities of interest have all established their own political parties, despite quite different institutional and political contexts in the two systems. In many ways, these arrangements reflect the two sides in the debate on the desirability of ethnic parties for democratic politics.

### **The Debate on Ethnic Political Parties**

In Horowitz' classic definition, an ethnically based party is a party that “derives its support overwhelmingly from an identifiable ethnic group (or cluster of ethnic groups) and serves the interests of that group” (Horowitz 2000, 291). An ethnic party does not have to be the exclusive party of that minority as minorities might split their political support among more than one political party. It is the group's cohesion and division that determines how many parties emerge (Horowitz 2000, 293).

However, for all ethnic parties, ethnicity becomes the principal source of support and they would try to find other sources of support only when they can do that at extremely low cost. Because of this, transforming an originally ethnic party into a multi ethnic one becomes extremely difficult (Horowitz 2000, 293).

Donald Horowitz has made a strong argument against ethnic parties by maintaining that ethnic parties tend to divide a divided society even further. As they

often represent strictly group interests, they are unable to concern themselves with issues of national importance and their behavior is dangerous for the good government of the country (Horowitz 2000, 294). Other authors have similarly argued that because ethnic parties make their political appeal specifically on ethnicity, their emergence ‘often has a centrifugal effect on politics’ (Reilly 2003). The resulting fragmentation of the party system has a detrimental effect on the stability of democracy and government in such situations. Reilly argues that states can make concerted efforts to encourage the initial development of multiethnic parties through their electoral and party legislation (Reilly 2003).

Stephen Wolf has similarly argued against the acceptance of “nationalist mobilization by sub-national groups” as “a normal and legitimate part of everyday politics in a free and democratic society” (Wolf 2002). Like Horowitz and Reilly, Wolf has called for the de-ethnicization of politics and has argued that it could be mandated through the electoral systems and party legislation.

In contrast, other authors have argued that ethnic parties pose challenges to democratic government only in deeply divided societies. Stroschein, for example, has maintained that ethnic parties do not cause ethnic conflict, but reflect differences (cleavages) that already exist. However, they “domesticate” ethnic issues into institutional forms, thus allowing them to be resolved in parliament rather than through violence. Ethnic parties, she maintains, usually play by the rules and have obtained some of their demands through the democratic process. Conflicts between these and other parties are routinized and the political process allows the parties to “find a way to bargain over heated issues and negotiate alternatives” (Stroschein



2001, 61). Others have similarly attributed the preservation of ethnic peace in various settings to the representation of ethnic parties in Parliament (Petkova 2000, 52).

If Stroschein and others base their arguments in support of ethnic parties on expediency, Will Kymlicka has gone even further to maintain that national mobilization by sub-national groups is a legitimate part of democratic politics. Although concerned with broader issues than just ethnic political parties, Kymlicka's argument for the introduction of various group-rights based solutions to the problems of ethnicity in the post-communist world, is based on the idea that politics is, and in some ways even should, be ethnically based. Kymlicka has argued that even secessionist parties need to be de-stigmatized as they are a legitimate expression of nation-building of minorities, something that a liberal-democratic nation-state needs to allow (Kymlicka 2001 and 2002).

### **Electoral rules and minority representation**

A natural extension of any of these two positions is the legal and institutional framework which states impose on any political actors within them, including potential ethnic parties. Constitutional provisions and electoral legislation are the most common instruments of state policy that can influence the success or failure of ethnic parties. As the constitutional treatment is a prerequisite for any electoral treatment, they are discussed within the framework of the relationship between electoral rules and ethnic parties. For its discussion of the electoral treatment of minorities, this paper borrows from the analytical framework of Carlos Flores Juberias's discussion of electoral arrangements and national minorities in post-communist Europe (Juberias 2000).

States that fear secessionist movements deeply, thus in a way reflecting the Horowitz side of the debate, can chose to ban ethnic parties from existence. Bulgaria and Albania are examples of systems in which ethnic based parties are banned in the Constitution or the Law on Parties and their activities are discouraged by the electoral laws (Juberias 2000, 37). Alternatively, legislation can mandate that parties need to be multi-ethnic in terms of their structures and membership, an especially useful practice in societies which are deeply divided among ethnic lines (Reilly 2003).

Assuming that ethnic parties are not banned, the nature of the electoral laws can significantly influence the chance of success or failure of ethnic parties, without providing them with any special treatment. That electoral systems have an impact on who gets representation in the legislative bodies is a long standing law in political science. According to Duverger's original formulation, the relationship is pretty straightforward. In plurality SMD systems, only one candidate can win in each district; as a result, any third party suffers from extreme under-representation because of both elite and voters strategies. This disadvantageous seat-vote ratio prevents the party from gaining the representation that it deserves, and the exposure, government participation, public funding or any other benefits associated with winning. It is thus, in the longer run, discouraged from running and forced to either join one of the two dominant parties, or disband (Duverger 1955, 225-6).

In contrast, proportional representation preserves the proportionality of votes and seats and thus, provides little or no reward for fusing and no punishment for splitting (Duverger 1953, 248-254). Although specifics of the PR system result in certain differences, and "full proportional representation exists nowhere" PR systems tend to have a 'multiplicative effect' on the number of parties (Duverger 1958, 253).

An enormous amount of work has been done since to test, qualify, and revise the Duverger's formulae (Rae 1971, Grofman and Lijphart 1986, Cox 1997, Lijphart 1991, 1994; Shvetsova and Ordershook 1994). Some of it has directly related to issue of political representation of minorities, probably best represented by Lijphart' theory of consociational democracy (Lijphart 1999). As proportional representation "lowers the hurdles for smaller parties" ethnic parties are more likely to gain representation in PR systems, this providing for peaceful resolution of ethnic issues and, ultimately for a higher support for the political system by the members of the minority (Lijphart 1999, Norris 2004, ?).<sup>3</sup> The underlying casual mechanism that provide for the benefits of consociationalism is thus based on the assumption that ethnic parties are present and active in the political system.

Several features that distinguish electoral systems within the PR family are likely to influence the chances for success of ethnic parties. As ethnic parties are usually small, the nature and presence of a electoral threshold is probably the most important one. Not only do higher thresholds hurt minorities, but thresholds set around the percentage point that reflects the minority proportion of the population also reduce the chances of the ethnic party. Similarly, when substantially raised thresholds apply to coalitions, minority parties are hurt especially as the vote is limited by the size of the minority (Juberias 2000, 35).

In addition, electoral legislation can hurt ethnic parties not because they are small, but because their support is regionally bound. Electoral regulations can require parties that want to participate in elections to field candidates in a large portion of the

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<sup>3</sup> It has to be mentioned, however, that in cases when the ethnic minorities is highly concentrated in only several regions, SMD electoral systems can also benefit it. However, case like this are relatively rare (Norris 2004, ?) .

country while party laws might limit public funding to parties with certain number of candidates as well (Roper 2003, Ikstens et al 2002).

Most of the Eastern European countries discussed here use proportional representation with thresholds of 4-5 % for individual parties. Romania, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic have thresholds of between 7 and 11 % for political coalitions. Hungary is the only country with a mixed electoral system, with a 5% threshold in its PR part. Given the size of minorities in these countries, their representation in the political process is often challenged by these thresholds. This is probably why most of the countries in the region have had to incorporate special provisions for ethnic minorities in the electoral systems.

The Czech and the Slovak Republics are the two countries of this group that do not specifically ban ethnic parties but apply their electoral systems neutrally to all parties (Juberias 2000, 36). Needless to say, given the homogenous nature of the population in the Czech Republic and the high threshold (5%) no ethnic party has ever managed to gain representation in the Czech Parliament. In Slovakia, the only minority party that has been represented in Parliament is the Hungarian minority party (MK) which is big enough to surpass the legal threshold of 5%.

Electoral arrangements can provide for the positive discrimination of ethnic parties by easing their requirements specifically for minority parties. Systems might relax the requirements for fielding candidates, register candidates, and run national campaigns, and even ignore the electoral threshold in the case of minority parties (Juberias 2000, 38). Such measures have been introduced by Poland in its legislation mandating national elections and by Hungary by only in local elections. Through that system the party of the German minority in Poland which has gotten between 1.2%

and 0.4% of the total vote has been able to secure a proportional number of seats in the Polish Sejm.

Finally, the most direct ways to ensure minority representation in the legislature is to provide minority parties or minorities as wholes with guaranteed representation in the national legislative body. Either groups officially recognized as minorities by the state, or any minority that runs a political party in elections can be granted these seats. Slovenia provides for the representation of two minorities that are constitutionally recognized as such,. Romania provides the strongest system of positive discrimination as it does not limit the number of minorities that can get representation (Juberias 2000, 44-49).

Both positive and negative discrimination of minorities – banning their parties or granting them special privileges have been criticized by various democratic theorists. The former for not allowing a basic right to all of its citizens, and the latter for violating the equality of representation, one of the basic principles of democracy. Moreover, the impact of electoral arrangements is often not as clear cut as electoral engineers sometimes claim it is. A close examination of these electoral arrangements and their impact on the success or failure of ethnic parties is thus clearly necessary before any certain conclusions.

### **Electoral Arrangements in Bulgaria and Romania: two extreme policy options**

Bulgaria and Romania represent the two extremes of the policy options discussed presently. Bulgaria has instituted the most restrictive form of institutional arrangements for ethnic parties by banning the existence of parties based on ethnic, racial and religious allegiance, thus obviously making any other electoral arrangements for minorities impossible. Romanian legislation guarantees one seat to a

legally constituted party of each and any minority (subject to certain restrictions), which is the most extreme form of positive discrimination in the whole region.

The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria forbids the existence of ethnic political parties in article 11 (4)

“There shall be no political parties on ethnic, racial, or religious lines, nor parties which seek the violent usurpation of state power.”  
(Bulgarian Constitution 1991)

This restriction is in line with the general spirit of the Bulgarian constitution which avoids the mention of the word minority and does not provide for any collective rights (Vassilev 2001, 43). In general, Bulgarian political actors seem fearful of the association of the word *national minority* with *secession* and generally refuse to use word in public discourse, calling national minorities “minority groups” (CEDIME 1999 and 2001). Despite allegations by minority rights advocates that the constitutional ban of ethnic parties is discriminatory and violates international laws, there has been no discussion of amending the constitution in any relevant way (BHC, various years).

The electoral system in Bulgaria is Proportional Representation with a 4% national threshold which treats political parties and coalitions identically. Public funding of political parties is provided for parliamentary parties only (Smilov 1999, IDEA 2004).

In contrast, Romania not only allows ethnic parties, but has introduced special provisions to guarantee that they have a seat in Parliament. The electoral system used in Romania is Proportional Representation. Parties or political formations must obtain at least 5% of the national popular vote to gain parliamentary representation. In the case of political alliances, 3% of the validly expressed votes throughout the country is

added to the 5% threshold for the second member party; and an extra 1% is added for each other member of the alliance, beginning with the third one, up to a maximum electoral threshold of 10% (Law for the Election of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate in Romania, 1992).

Most importantly, however, legally constituted organizations of citizens belonging to a national minority, which have not obtained at least one Deputy seat through the general rules of the elections, have the right to a seat in Parliament. The only stipulation is that they must have obtained, at national level, at least 5% of the average number of the validly expressed votes needed for the elections of one Deputy according to the general rules of elections (Law for the Election of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, 1992).

The Romanian system of positive discrimination of minorities is thus an extremely strong as it does not limit the number of minorities that can get representation. Through that system about fifteen minorities have, on average, gained representation in Parliament (Juberias 2000, 44-49). The broadness of the definition has been criticized for basically allocating the same status to minorities of various sizes and positions in society.

### **The Bulgarian “Ethnic Model”**

The presence of a constitutional ban on ethnic parties, however, has not meant that no ethnic parties have been present in Bulgarian politics. *De facto* ethnic parties have managed to maintain a stable position in the political process by not openly registering as ethnic political entities. However, for most of the 1990s, this was only possible for the relatively numerous and powerful Turkish minority in Bulgaria.

The Turkish-dominated Movement of Right and Freedoms (DPS) was founded officially in early 1990. Although it does not have an openly stated ethnic platform and included ethnic Bulgarians in both its membership and its leadership, it represents the interests of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and its support is concentrated heavily in the region populated by the minority. It gained a consistent share of the vote throughout the 1990s and has been present in all legislatures (Kumanov 1999: 134). Its support was considered instrumental for the changes of governments during 1991-1994. Since 2001 the DPS has been an official coalition partner in the Bulgarian government (Harper 2003, 339).

**[Table 3 About Here]**

The ability of the MRF to function freely in Bulgarian politics was challenged at numerous times in the early 1990s. By the late 1990s, there was no major concern that the constitutional provision can prevent either the DPS or the fledgling Roma political parties from participating in the political process (Vassilev 2001).

The DPS has thus been able to function well in Bulgarian political life despite the constitutional ban and the absence of special electoral treatment of ethnic parties in Bulgaria. Its substantial size, as well as the loyalty the DPS and its leader Ahmed Dogan have managed to cultivate in a big part of the minority have mainly contributed to this result.

**[Table 4 about Here]**

The DPS has a very high extent of encapsulation of its voters – measured as the ratio of its members to its voters; it is second only to the BSP in Bulgaria and way above any averages for non-ex communist parties in the region (van Biezen 2003). About 45% of the whole Turkish majority (including non-voters) voted for the DPS.



The DPS thus has not been hurt by the constitutional or the electoral arrangements in Bulgaria. The 4 % threshold has only once come close to posing a threat to the DPS; in the 1994 elections the party got a little over 5 % of the vote. As a result, the DPS formed a coalition with some other, non-ethnic parties in 1997 (ONS), although the DPS contributed most of the support for the coalition in the elections. The coalition did not last long and in the 2001 elections the DPS formed a new coalition with one liberal and one Roma party.

However, as its deputy chairman indicated, the DPS realizes that it cannot expand its vote any more than it already has unless it reaches outside the Turkish minority (Dal 2003). Consequently, since 2001 then DPS has been making a conscious effort to transform itself into a liberal party: it has tried to include more ethnic Bulgarian in its leadership, and has joined the Liberal International. However, as Horowitz suggests, achieving this has proven extremely challenging because most Bulgarians do not associate the DPS with liberal values but with a strong commitment to defending the interests of the Turkish minority.

The DPS itself and numerous commentators and analysts have praised the Bulgarian “ethnic model” as represented by the incorporation of the DPS in mainstream democratic politics, the moderation of the DPS policy positions over time, and its law-abiding behavior (Vassilev 2001, Tatarli 2003, Petkova 2002). The “ethnic model” has been seen as the major factor for the preservation of ethnic peace in the country, the respect of the civil and political rights of the Turkish minority, and for their relatively good economic well being. However, the Bulgarian “ethnic model” has excluded any other minority, a fact that has been painfully obvious in the situation of the Roma.

Roma parties have been unable to secure a stable place in Bulgarian politics. Several factors account for this. First, the initial registration of some Roma parties was not permitted based on the Constitutional ban of ethnic parties. Second, the Roma minority is much more heterogeneous than the Turkish one, and is also scattered around the country. This makes it almost impossible for them to mobilize and support a single national party. Finally, the Bulgarian Roma represent just about 4% of the population, equivalent to the threshold of the electoral system, making the success of an even well organized and unified Roma party doubtful.

The Bulgarian Roma parties are not unique in this regard. As Stroschein has argued, to be successful an ethnic party must obtain a high percentage of votes from a finite political base – the groups that it represents (Stroschein 2001: 61) Ethnic parties thus require a lot of consensus minded politicians Achieving this is often an infeasible option for the diverse Roma communities and fragmentation has been a common feature of the Roma political organizations throughout Eastern Europe (Baranyi 2001, 3). The absence of any electoral encouragement for the Roma parties in Bulgaria, however, has made their representation in Parliament even less likely than in most other post-communist systems.

The Roma in Bulgaria began to organize right after the democratic changes of 1989. By mid 1990 they had formed the Democratic Union Roma (DUM), led by Manush Romanov. The union, however, was denied registration as political party and could not compete in the immediate elections. In addition, the Union was plagued by disagreements about its ideology and position on cooperation with other parties (Parushev 2003). While the Roma NGO sector grew relatively quickly over the next few years, and partly *because* it did, Roma political mobilization was stunted. For the

most of the 1990s the only representation the Roma got was through the mainstream political parties. This was a very limited form of representation in which one or two Roma had a symbolic presence in Parliament during each term.<sup>4</sup> According to

Danova of the European Roma Rights Center:

“This practice proved to be a dead-end road for the representation of Roma in parliamentary politics. Not only it accounts for severe under-representation of Roma, but also makes their cause contingent on the policies of the majority parties, generally indifferent—if not hostile—to the aspirations of Roma. Again, this practice served best the majority politicians and the authorities who were provided with a shield against criticism that Roma were excluded from political life (Danova 2001).”

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<sup>4</sup> Cooperation with the party of the Turkish minority, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), seemed to be a natural choice for some of the Roma leaders. The argument that the two minorities faced common problems as well as the proclaimed desire of the DPS to defend the rights and of all people, minorities and individuals in Bulgaria made this an alluring possibility

In 1994, Georgi Parushev, a leading Roma activist and DUR founder, campaigned for the DPS hoping to manage to get into Parliament through their lists, arguing that this was good way to use already existing structures to achieve political representation for the Roma (Tarashleva, 1994). However, he was unsuccessful. Cooperation between the two ethnic groups did not pick up again until the 2001 elections.

In the 2001 elections the DPS formed an electoral coalition with Evroroma, an important Roma organization in Bulgaria. “MRF placed a number of Romani representatives on its ticket, all of them, however, at unelectable low positions. As a result, the MRF failed to ensure the election of a single Romani candidate in the 2001 elections”(Iliev 2001). By 2003, the DPS discarded any possibility for future cooperation with the Roma party (Dal 2003)

Cooperation with the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) has also been a common policy for the Roma political leaders and has been relatively welcome by the BSP leadership through most of the 1990s. The major argument behind this position is that the problems of the Roma are mostly of a nature that calls for a very active state involvement. Consequently, the Roma are on the left side of the political continuum and they naturally should support the major political actor on the left – the BSP (Sega 2002). The traditional link between the BSP (BCP before 1989) and some of the Roma socialist-time leaders has also facilitated this cooperation (Parushev 2003). However, this cooperation has been far from fair to the Roma minority. Although a couple of Roma leaders have achieved representation through the BSP over the years, the concern of the BSP, with the situation of the Roma minority has been minimal (Iliev 2001).

The Union of Democratic Forces, as the major anti-communist political organization in Bulgaria, was also a natural partner for the new Roma political organizations in the early 1990s. Manus Romanov – the first Roma representative in Parliament after 1989 was elected on the UDF list. However, for the rest of 1990s the UDF became “notorious for disregarding Roma as possible partners during elections.” (Iliev 2001) Despite the fact that some of the Roma Leaders were openly pro-UDF, their loyalty “bore no fruits” (Mladenov 2003). While cooperation between the UDF and some Roma parties exists in some localities, there has been no major cooperation at national level.

It was not until 1997-1998 that Roma organizations again began to show genuine political ambition and to make the first steps towards organizing for elections (Mladenov 2003). Due to the constitutional ban Roma political organizations are either not registered as parties or have non-Roma specific names. Twenty one Roma political organization were founded between 1997 and 2003 in Bulgaria, including *Free Bulgaria*, *Party for Social and Democratic Change* (PSDC), *Evrroma* and *Citizens' Union Roma* as the more visible and active ones.<sup>5</sup>

The local elections in late 1999 were the first elections at which Roma parties competed in elections. *Free Bulgaria* managed to get three Roma elected as mayors and place over 60 Roma as local councilors. The successful Roma participation led to quite high optimism about the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2001. "The recent local elections indicate that there is a possibility that a Roma party may reach the 4% threshold and win seats in parliament in the next parliamentary election in 2001" (ERRC 1999).

However, the heterogeneity of the Roma population and infighting among the leaders prevented a unified Roma party from emerging despite numerous efforts of various NGOS and international organizations (OSCE among others) to encourage this. Two of the main parties – *Free Bulgaria* and *PSDC* appeared in a coalition with six smaller organizations and parties at the 2001 elections. However, *Evrroma* chose to run in a coalition with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, while *Citizens'*

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<sup>5</sup>*Free Bulgaria* was originally led by Tzar Kiro – the self-proclaimed tsar of the Roma in Bulgaria and was established in 1997. It is currently led by his son, Prince Angel.

ROS Kupate is an organization primarily concerned with the economic development of the Roma and has an ideology that is close to the "democratic idea" (i.e. the UDF). (Mladenov 2003) The organization's leader established the *Party for Social and Democratic Change* (PSDC) in 2000.

In 1998, Tzvetelin Kunchev established *Evrroma*. Kunchev was elected to the National Assembly through the Bulgarian Business Black lists in 1997. By 2000, his immunity as member of Parliament was removed to allow the courts to prosecute him for several crimes.

*Union Roma* joined the BSP coalition. At the 2001 elections, *National Union Tzar Kiro*, as the Roma coalition was called, got 27,000 votes or about 0.6% of the popular vote. Very few of the Roma in Bulgaria voted for the party although Roma participation in the elections is estimated at around 65% (UNDP). After this defeat the coalition perceived as a defeat, it fell apart (Mladenov 2003)

**[Table 5 about Here]**

At present, there are two Roma representatives in the Bulgarian Parliament. One elected through a coalition of his party with the BSP and one elected through the lists of NDSV. As the newest of the major Bulgarian parties NDSV (National Movement Simeon the Second) quickly adopted the policy common to the rest of the Bulgarian parties – it courted Roma voters before elections, nominated (and sent to Parliament) one representative, and assumed its job of representing the Roma to be done.

The slim chance of even a unified Roma party to surpass the 4% threshold makes their coalition even more unlikely. Forming coalitions with one of the bigger parties and securing a few seats is a much better strategy from the point of view of the leaders of Roma parties. While in early 2002 Tomov, leader of the *Citizens' Union Roma*, was quite optimistic about the future unification of the three Roma parties, by late 2002 he was actively campaigning for continuation of his cooperation with the BSP in light of the upcoming local elections in October 2003 (Tomov 20002, Sega 2002). Both *Evrroma* and *PSDC* participated on their own in the local elections, while *Free Bulgaria* did not run their own candidates, but supported various candidates depending on local circumstances (BTA 2003, Sega 2003). As of early 2004 there are no plans for cooperation among the four.

**Ethnic Representation in Romania**

Similar to the DPS in Bulgaria, the party of the ethnic Hungarians in Romania, the Hungarian Democratic Union (UDMR/RMDSZ) has had a substantial role in Romanian political life. As ethnic parties are not banned in Romania it has never had any problems with displaying its ethnic basis. It has also managed to preserve itself as the exclusive party of the Hungarian minority. Election results are provided in Table 6.

**[Table 6 about Here]**

The UDMR has gained representation in all post 1989 Parliaments at a level that roughly corresponds to the Hungarian proportion of the population. In addition it has remained in many ways the only stable party in Romanian politics, besides the communist successor party in Romania. In addition, it was part of the governing coalitions from 1996 until 2000, a fact that many saw as a major step towards achieving ethnic harmony in Romania.

As illustrated by Table 7, the UDMR support is also very highly encapsulated. Its membership to electorate ratio was about 65% in 1996, a level that is much higher than the DPS and any other party in the region as well. A large proportion of the Hungarian minority also voted for them, an important fact given how close the proportion of Hungarians in Romania is to the electoral threshold of the electoral system (Stroschein 2001).

**[Table 7 about Here]**

Overall, the UDMR has benefited from the provisions of Romania's PR system (as it could be hurt by a potential SMD system) but not from the positive discrimination system that exists for other minorities in the Romanian system. It can be argued that given the nature of the minority and the experience of the DPS in

Bulgaria, the UMDR would have done equally well under a typical PR system with no ethnic element.

In fact, the demands of the UMDR have at times reached much more extreme levels than the ones of the DPS. It threatened to leave from the government coalitions in 1997 and 1998 “if demands for state funded Hungarian university were not met” and has repeatedly called for some degree of autonomy for Hungarian-majority regions (Stroschein 2001, 61). This trend has been exacerbated with the internal split in the UDMR in 2003: its radical wing for territorial autonomy for Transylvania. In contrast to the DPS, the UDMR has obviously not made any efforts to escape its ethnic nature. The higher degree of radicalization along ethnic lines might be attributed to the acceptance of ethnicity as a legitimate political cleavage in Romania’s general legislation.

The same feature, however, has allowed for the Roma in Romania to do much better in terms of political mobilization and representation in comparison to the Roma in Bulgaria. Roma parties have been running in elections from the very first democratic elections and one of them has gotten the guaranteed 1 seat in the legislature at every election.

#### **[Table 8 about Here]**

As of the last elections, two Roma representative were members of the Romanian Parliament, one through the reserved seat and one was elected on the lists of the ruling Party of Social Democracy (PSD). The Roma political activity has clearly been dominated by the Partida Rromilor, which now “receives government subsidies, allowing it to further strengthen its network and better prepare for its next electoral campaign” (Roma Rights 2003).

The Roma Parties in Romania seem to enjoy higher levels of support amongst the Roma minority than do Bulgarian Roma parties.

**[Table 9 about Here]**

About twice as big of a proportion of the Roma in Romania vote for the Roma parties, compared to Bulgaria; the percentage of the minority (of the total population) is four times as much as the vote share of the Roma parties (of total vote) in Romania; while the percentage of the minority is seven times as big the vote share of Roma parties in Bulgaria.

However, the Romanian system of positive discrimination has underrepresented the Roma minority while overrepresented many others. The vote-seat ratio for the Roma parties ranges 0.22 in 1996 to 0.48 in 1990, with 1 being perfect proportionality. Electoral arrangements of the kind that exist in Poland (which allow ethnic parties to gain representation proportional to their vote no matter whether they have passed the electoral threshold or not) would have allowed for much stronger representation of the minority in the Romanian legislature. The level of representation of Roma parties in the Romanian Parliament is still however infinitely larger than the one of Roma parties in Bulgaria.

Overall, the Romanian Roma parties have been able to gain much more visibility in the political life than the Roma parties in Bulgaria. While in terms of number of Roma in Parliament there is no significant difference between Bulgaria and Romania, the ability of the Romania Roma to achieve representation through their own parties has allowed them to gain more influence in Romanian politics. For example, as a result of the pre-election agreement between the PSD, the winning party in the Romanian 2000 elections and Partida Romilor, the latter received as position in the state administration – undersecretary of state and Head of the National Office for



Roma; as well as one position as an advisor to the President of Romania. Partida Romilor also negotiated the appointment of Roma in the offices of regional and local governments throughout the country (NDI 2003a).

Clearly, these achievements go well beyond what the Roma in Bulgaria have managed to achieve. In 1999, the Bulgarian Roma organizations drafted a *Framework Program for the Equal Integration of Roma in Society* that outlined the problems of the Roma minority and the policies needed to resolve these. The framework was signed by the then current government, but neither it, nor its successor have taken any “concrete” steps to implement it. While the very fact that the Framework was agreed upon was a major achievement for the Roma minority, nothing seems to have come out of it (NDI 2003b). Overall, it seems that even the token representation of Roma ethnic *parties* in the legislature can make a difference when compared to token representation of Roma leaders only.

### **Consequences for Minority Political Representation**

The final question that this paper addresses is whether having Roma parties in Parliament elected on their own terms has had any effect on the political attitudes of the Roma minority in Romania. For this purpose, the paper presents data from the 2001 Survey of Roma in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and the Czech and the Slovak Republics carried out by the UNDP (UNDP 2001). I report data on several indicators of political participation: voter turnout, trust in a Roma or any political party; and feelings of being represented in the government and compare the trends among the Bulgarian and Romanian Roma. Results are presented in Table 10.

Roma in both Bulgaria and Romania exhibit high involvement in the electoral process – in both countries the voter turnout for the Roma is just around or above the national turnout rate for this particular election, a fact that is curious given the low

education level and economic status of the Roma in society. However, the voter turnout of Romanian Roma is markedly higher than the one of the Roma in Bulgaria – a difference of about 14 percent. Although it might be a stretch to attribute this to the presence of Roma parties in Parliament, the temptation is there.

Further, Romanian Roma exhibit a substantially higher familiarity and trust in their own political parties. About 27 percent can name a Roma party they trust in Romania, while only about 5% of the Bulgarian Roma can do the same. The contrast is even more striking when we compare these figures to the percentage of Roma who could name any other party that would trust. About the same number of Roma in Romania could do so – a little bit over 28%, while the number of Roma who would name a trusted party in Bulgaria was more than three times more than the number of people who could name a trusted Roma party. The results clearly indicate a much higher familiarity with Roma parties at similar level of general familiarity with political parties. When asked directly about the source of support for the Roma in their country, Roma in Romania indicated they can rely on the Roma parties at an almost twice as higher rate than the Bulgarian Roma. Intriguingly, the Romanian Roma also exhibit much lower rates of relying on the state to support them.

However, the difference in familiarity with Roma parties might be an artifact of the fact that there have been many more Roma parties in Romania and they have been much more active over the years than their counterparts in Bulgaria. A more interesting question is, is there a difference of how Roma feel about the political process in general. Regretfully there is only one survey question that taps into the efficacy of the Roma. Based on the answers to the question “Do you feel your interests are well represented (at different levels of government)?” Romanian Roma show much higher levels of satisfaction with the way their interests are represented at

all levels of government. The active presence or absence of Roma parties in the political system thus does seem to make a difference for the political attitudes and behavior of the Roma minority in Bulgaria and Romania, thus lending support to the original propositions of consociational theory and the advocates for having ethnic parties.

## **Conclusion**

While the constitutional ban of ethnic parties in Bulgaria has not hurt the Turkish minority, it seems to have at least originally impeded the development of Roma political parties. In addition, the absence of any positive discrimination with respect to ethnic minorities as well as the 4% threshold needed to gain representation have further prevented the Roma of Bulgaria with sending their own representatives to Parliament.

In Romania, the arrangements of positive discrimination do not appear to have made much of a difference for the electoral fate of the Hungarian minority party, but has influenced the development of Roma parties. Electoral arrangements thus seem to matter, but to mostly do so in situations where other factors of political mobilization seem to make representation uncertain. The effect of electoral arrangements on the success of ethnic parties is clearly mitigated by the size and dynamics of the minority they represent.

Although the findings are clearly in need of further investigation, the differences in political attitudes and behavior between Bulgarian and Romanian Roma lend some support to the hypothesis that electoral rules can influence the nature of politics in a country. Going back to the original discussion, the logic behind the theory of consociationalism is that electoral rules will influence the chance of small parties, including ethnic ones, to gain representation in the legislature, which would in turn

lead to greater support for the political system on behalf of the minority (Norris 2004). At least for the case of the small parties of the Roma minority in Romania and Bulgaria this seems to be the case.

Finally, the ethnicization of political conflict might have created more radical nationalism in the case of the Romanian Hungarians than the *officially* non-ethnic representation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. While DPS policy positions have been moderated over the 1990s, the ones of the UMDR seem to have gotten more radical. Thus, the present discussion seems to contribute little to a definitive answer of the debate on the desirability of ethnic parties. Instead, the discussion indicates that the effect of the ethnicization of politics on the political development of any state will depend on several additional factors.

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## **Tables**

**Table 1: Minority Groups in Bulgaria**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Size of Minority</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Population</b>
Turks	746 664	9.42%
Roma	370 908	4.68% <sup>9</sup>
Russians	15 595	0.20%
Armenians	10 832	0.14%
Vlachs	10 566	0.13%
Others	29 722	0.38%

Source: National Statistical Institute, Official Census of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2001. Available at <http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Ethnos.htm> (in Bulgarian)

**Table 2: Minorities in Romania**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Size of Minority</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Population</b>
Hungarians	1,434,377	6.6 %
Roma	535,250	2.5 %
Germans	60,088	0.28 %
Ukrainians	61,091	0.28 %
Russians	36,397	0.17 %
Turks	32,596	0.15 %
Tatars	24,137	0.11 %
Serbs	22,518	0.10 %

Source: Alionescu, Ciprian-Calin. 2003.

<http://www.psa.ac.uk/cps/2003/Ciprian%20Alionescu.pdf>

**Table 3: Political Parties in Bulgaria, Percentage of the Popular Vote, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1997 and 2001 elections**

Party	1990	1991	1994	1997	2001
Coalition for Bulgaria/BSP and Coalition	47.2	33.1	43.5	22.5	17.1
Union of Democratic Forces /ODS	36.2	34.4	24.2	53.2	18.2
Bulgarian Agrarian National Union	8.0	3.9	6.5	-	-
<b>Movement for Rights &amp; Freedoms/as ONS in 1997</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>7.5</b>
Bulgarian Business Block	-	1.3	4.7	5.0	0.0
Euroleft	-	-	-	5.6	1.0
National Movement Simeon the Second	-	-	-	-	42.7

**Source:** Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections and Parties in New European Democracies*, available at the CSPP website, <http://www.cspp.strath.ac.uk/>

**Table 4: Encapsulation of the DPS voters and the Turkish Minority, 2001 elections**

<b>DPS Members 2001-2002</b>	<b>58,000</b>
As percent of the voters	16.93%
As percent of the minority	7.77%
<b>Votes for the DPS in 2001</b>	<b>340,395</b>
As percent of minority	45%
As percent of total vote	7.5%
<b>Size of the Turkish Minority</b>	<b>746, 664</b>
As percent of total population	9.42%

**Sources:** National Statistical Institute, Official Census of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2001. Available at <http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Ethnos.htm> (in Bulgarian); Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections and Parties in New European Democracies*, available at the CSPP website, <http://www.cspp.strath.ac.uk/> Membership data from Dal 2003.

**Table 5: Encapsulation of the Roma parties' support and the Roma minority, 2001 elections**

<b>Votes for the Coalition Tzar Kiro in 2001</b>	<b>27, 000</b>
As percent of the minority	7.27 %
As percent of total vote	0.6%
<b>Size of the Roma Minority</b>	<b>370 908</b>

As percent of total population	4.67%
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**Sources:**

National Statistical Institute, Official Census of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2001.

Available at <http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Ethnos.htm> (in Bulgarian);

Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections and Parties in New European Democracies*, available at the CSPP website, <http://www.cspp.strath.ac.uk/>

**Table 6: Political Parties in Romania, Percentage of the Popular Vote, 1990, 1992, 1996 and 2000 elections**

Party	1990	1992	1996	2000
National Salvation Front/ Democratic National Salvation Front/PDSR	66.3	27.7	21.5	36.6
<b>Hungarian Democratic Union</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>6.8</b>
National Liberal Party -Campeanu	6.4	2.6	-	1.4
Democratic Convention of Romania	-	20.0	30.2	5.0
Democratic Party - NSF	-	10.2	-	7.0
Romanian National Unity Party	-	7.7	4.4	1.4
Greater Romania Party	-	3.9	4.5	19.5
Social Democratic Union	-	-	12.9	-
National Liberal Party	-	-	1.6	6.9
Others	7.2	10.5	10.7	8.8

**Source:**

Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections and Parties in New European Democracies*, available at the CSPP website, <http://www.cspp.strath.ac.uk/>

**Table 7: Encapsulation of the UMDR support, 1996**

<b>UMDR Members 1995</b>	<b>533,000</b>
As percent of its voters	65%
As percent of the minority	37%
<b>Votes for the UMDR in 1996</b>	<b>812,628</b>
As percent of the minority	56%
As percent of total vote	7.5%
<b>Size of the Hungarian minority</b>	<b>1,434,377</b>
As percent of total population	6.6%

Sources: Michael Shafir, “The Hungarian Democratic Federation of Romania” in Stein; Richard Rose and Neil Munro, *Elections and Parties in New European Democracies*, available at the CSPP website, <http://www.cspp.strath.ac.uk/>; and Alionescu, Ciprian-Calin. 2003. <http://www.psa.ac.uk/cps/2003/Ciprian%20Alionescu.pdf>

**Table 8: Roma Parties in Romania, 1990-2000**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Percent Vote</b>	<b>Seats</b>	<b>Percent Seats</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>Democratic Union of the Roma of Romania (Uniunea Democrata a Romilor din Romania)</b>	<b>29162</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.25</b>
	Party of the Gypsies of Romania (Partidul Tiganilor din Romania)	16865	0.12	0	0
	United Democratic Party of the Roma Woodworkers and Fiddlers in Romania (Partidul Unit Democrat al Romilor, Rudarilor, si Lautarilor din Romania)	21847	0.16	0	0
	Free Democratic Union of Roma in Romania (Uniunea Libera Democratica a Romilor din Romania)	4605	0.03	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>72479</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.25</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>Roma Party (Partida Romilor)</b>	<b>52704</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.29</b>
	Free Democratic Union of the Roma in Romania (Uniunea Libera Democratica a Romilor din Romania)	31384	0.29	0	0
	Party of Gypsies in Romania (Partidul Tiganilor din Romania)	9949	0.09	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>94037</b>	<b>0.86</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.29</b>
<b>1996</b>	Roma Party (Partida Romilor)	82195	0.67	1	0.29
	Roma Union (Uniunea Romilor)	71020	0.58	0	0
	Community of the Roma Ethnicity in Romania (Comunitatea Etniei Rromilor din Romania)	5227	0.04	0	0
	Union of the Roma, Constanta County (Uniunea Rromilor Judetul Constanta)	640	0.01	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>159082</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.29</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>PRr - Roma Party (Partida Rromilor)</b>	<b>71786</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.29</b>
	CCRR - Christian Centre of the Rroma in Romania (Centrul Crestin al Romilor din Romania)	12171	0.11	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>83957</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.29</b>

**Source:** *Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe*  
<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/indexCountry.asp?country=ROMANIA&opt=elc/>

**Table 9: Encapsulation of the Roma Party support, 2000 elections**

<b>Votes for the Partida Rromilor</b>	<b>71786</b>
As percent of the minority	15.6%
As percent of total vote	0.63%
<b>Size of the Roma Minority</b>	<b>535 250</b>
As percent of total population	2.5%

**Sources:** *Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe*  
<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/indexCountry.asp?country=ROMANIA&opt=elc/>; and Alionescu, Ciprian-Calin. 2003.  
<http://www.psa.ac.uk/cps/2003/Ciprian%20Alionescu.pdf>

**Table 10: Some indicators of the Roma minority political pre-dispositions:**

<b>Voter Turnout for the Roma Minority in the 2001 elections in Bulgaria and the 2000 elections in Romania</b>		
	<b>Country</b>	
	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Romania</b>
<b>Voted</b>	65.8 %	80.12 %
<b>Did not Vote</b>	33.7 %	16.28 %
<b>N/r</b>	0.5 %	3.6 %
<b>Voter turnout for the whole country (aggregate results):</b>	66.77 %	65%

<b>Could you name a Roma political party you would trust?</b>		
	<b>Country</b>	
	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Romania</b>
<b>Indicated</b>	5.52%	27.07%
<b>Don't know</b>	94.48%	72.93%

<b>Could you name some other political party you would trust?</b>		
	<b>Country</b>	
	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Romania</b>
<b>Indicated</b>	18.46%	28.37%
<b>Don't know</b>	81.54%	71.63%

**On whom can Roma in your country rely for support? Percent of people who answered yes to each category.**

	Country	
	Bulgaria	Romania
Roma parties	19.86	35.66
Roma NGOs	20.36	12.69
Informal Roma leaders	13.54	29.07
Well-off or Rich Roma individuals	18.56	11.99
Neighbors and friends from the majority	35.31	18.98
Roma neighbors and friends	46.74	29.37
Non-Roma NGOs with human rights profile	11.53	18.08
The government itself	42.73	21.28
Foreign donors/institutions	29.59	13.29

**Do you think your interests are represented well enough? Percent of Roma who answered "Yes"**

	Country	
	Bulgaria	Romania
At national level	7.82 %	18.18 %
At municipal level	12.74 %	16.68 %
At the level of the community	14.14 %	33.47 %

Source: UNDP, 2002. *Avoiding the Dependency Trap*, Regional Data Set <http://roma.undp.sk/>; general voter turnout from <http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/>



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